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# What's Past is Prologue: Celebrating 40 Seasons of Idaho Shakespeare Festival

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# WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE

## *Celebrating 40 Seasons of Idaho Shakespeare Festival*

Idaho Shakespeare Festival celebrates its 40th season this summer. In those 40 years, it has grown from humble beginnings to a nationally recognized and respected regional theater company. That Boise is included in this national tour of Shakespeare's First Folio—commemorating 400 years since his death—is a measure of ISF's success. And just as the Bard offered up his stories for the Folio, it is fitting to share the story of Idaho Shakespeare Festival on this double anniversary.

Recognizing Boise's great local talent, in 1976 Doug Copsey decided the city needed a professional theater company. The goal was to keep this wonderful talent pool from leaving like so many before them—to create the right combination of circumstances that grabbed the attention of the city's already

supportive arts audience and keep them coming back for more. In 1977, Copsey's dream was realized thanks to enthusiastic collaboration, starting with his Co-Artistic Director Victoria Holloway, and including Michael Hoffman, Dan Peterson, Doug and Skip Oppenheimer, and many, many others. The troupe's first season had little budget, eight performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a temporary location at One Capital Center, and an audience of 3500. Now in its 40th season, ISF has a permanent state-of-the-art outdoor amphitheater and presents nearly 100 performances of five plays to more than 61,000 ticket holders each summer.

This exhibit celebrates ISF's 40 seasons and features adapted excerpts, quotes, and photographs from *With Our Good Will, 50 Years of Shakespeare in Idaho*, a history of ISF

written by founder Doug Copsey and published by Caxton Press. We hope you enjoy this journey through the cast of characters, productions, locations, and anecdotes that chronicles ISF's legacy and community. With special thanks to Gwyn Hervochon and Cheryl Oestreicher of Boise State's Special Collections and Archives, which has the Idaho Shakespeare Festival historical collection. As Doug Copsey notes, it is "waiting in boxes for curious eyes who want to know more about the unique, wonderful, and still growing family that is the Idaho Shakespeare Festival." For more information visit the website: <https://archives.boisestate.edu/>

*Images courtesy of Idaho Shakespeare Festival Collection and Idaho Statesman Photograph Collection, Special Collections and Archives, Albertsons Library.*



*"What comes to mind is a lot of conversation at Doug's old house on 12th Street. A lot of dreaming, a lot of hoping that there might be the possibility of creating professional theater in Idaho."*

—Michael Hoffman, Actor/Director





WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE

## The Debut, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1977



In 1976, Doug Copsey first saw the sloping lawn and cascading steps just outside of the ground-level Main Street Bistro restaurant at One Capital Center in downtown Boise. In an epiphany, he saw a ready-made amphitheater waiting to come to life. After months of planning, on July 24, 1977, the transformation of the outdoor grass and concrete space into a Shakespearean stage began. The giant set was hauled in on Sterling Landscape trucks, carried down the steps, and bolted into place. A palpable

energy took over as everyone in the newly-created theater company realized this wild and crazy scheme was actually going to happen.

More than 300 people attended the first opening night of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. About 3,500 people attended the eight shows that first season, at \$3.25 each. The reviews and the audience reaction confirmed that the dream of a successful professional theater company in Boise was now a reality.

*“Would anyone come was the major question in everyone’s mind as the first curtain time approached. Did the people of the Boise Valley think we were all crazy to assume that they would enjoy Shakespeare sitting on a grassy hill?”*

—Joyce Delana, Staff

### IMAGES

#### Left, top to bottom:

Set construction at One Capital Center. L-R: Seelye Smith as Hippolyta, and Dan Peterson as Egeus (IDAHO STATESMAN.)

“The fence” built by cast and crew. Joel Farmer as Bottom, Seelye Smith as Titania. L-R, Patrick Delana as Demetrius, Linda Pommerening as Hermia, Michael Hoffman as Lysander, Barbara McKean as Helena. Birds-eye view of One Capital Center.

#### Center:

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* at One Capital Center (IDAHO STATESMAN.)

#### Right:

Doug Copsey as Oberon, Jim Bottoms as Puck.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY IDAHO STATESMAN, DAVID BLAIN BOGIE AND UNKNOWN





WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE

## One Capital Center, 1977-1980



In the first few years, ISF grew into a professional quality theater company with support from the downtown community. Skip and Doug Oppenheimer provided free use of the amphitheater, and Ray's Oasis (formerly Main Street Bistro) allowed use of the restaurant's phone number and gave free soft drinks and water for the cast and crew.

For the 1979 season, the company offered two shows instead of one, and increased the run to two weeks per show. A fundraising campaign to raise the \$15,000 needed for that summer's productions included forming a Patron Steering Committee and fundraising events such as "An Evening with Shakespeare,"

and auditions for the 1980 season expanded to New York and San Francisco.

Known as the "Main Street Bistro Summer Theater Festival" for the first 3 seasons, the group officially became Idaho Shakespeare Festival in 1980, establishing itself as a non-profit organization led by a Board of Trustees. With attendance growing exponentially each year, the Board agreed to expand to three shows per season. By the end of the One Capital Center years, attendance topped 11,300, all the bills were paid, contracts were met, and for the fourth year in a row the Festival was in the black. There was no longer any question about whether they would return the next year; it was simply expected.



*"And each evening,  
watching that lawn  
fill up with people  
anxiously awaiting  
the start of the show,  
I couldn't help but  
feel like the luckiest  
person on the  
planet."*

—Doug Copsey



### IMAGES

#### Left, top to bottom:

Set load-in, 1980. Ensemble, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 1978. Patrick Delana as Balthasar, Tom Pfenninger as Gregory, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1979. Victoria Holloway as Julia, Bruce Richardson as Proteus, Stitch Marker as Valentine, Seelye Smith as Sylvia, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 1978. Connie Cremeens and Jeannie Rice at the box office, 1979. Set construction, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 1978.

#### Center:

Dan Peterson as Launce with his dog "Crab," *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 1978.

#### Right, top to bottom:

Set design by Jon Ostrove, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 1978. Ensemble, *Taming of the Shrew*, 1980. Set load-in, *Taming of the Shrew*, 1980.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID BLAIN BOGIE AND UNKNOWN





WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE

## The Plantation Years, 1981-1983



Early in March 1981, Ray's Oasis announced it would no longer occupy the basement of One Capital Center. The frantic search began for a new outdoor space by exploring parks, vacant lots, and industrial areas—anywhere there was a large open space that could hold a stage, dressing rooms, a few hundred people, and parking. The Plantation Golf Club offered a site at the end of their property, with a pond adjacent to a grove of cottonwoods. The Plantation said that if ISF drained the pond, they could use the site for no charge. By opening night, the pond was gone and ISF had a stage graded flat and topped with a clay and sand road mix.

The troupe continued with three shows each season, with frequent sold-out nights. As the audience numbers increased, the curtain speeches before performances

encouraged people to “scooch” together, so more people could attend. To further connect with the community, ISF started outreach and educational activities, including a newsletter *Shake-Scene* and Idaho Theater for Youth.

At the March 7, 1984 board meeting, President Chuck Robertson announced that the Festival had lost the Plantation lease. Adding to this transitional moment, Doug Copsey gave up his position as Artistic Director in 1983, choosing to remain active with the company as a member of the Board. As the new Artistic Director, Mark Cuddy picked up where Doug left off and kept the company moving forward. The company, the Board, and most importantly the community, put faith in Mark as a leader who could get things done, and someone who could take the Festival to the next level.

*“Cuddy was a choice move. He was an ace move. I mean, he made stuff happen, stuff that Doug and I couldn’t make happen. He knew exactly what he was doing. Doug and I were playing it by ear. It was jazz for us, but for him it was a symphony.”*

—Jim Owen, Executive Producer



### IMAGES

#### Left, top to bottom:

New stage construction, 1983. Barry Press, Director, *As You Like It*, 1981. L-R: Brian King as Duke Frederick, Matt DeCaro as Benedick, Doug Copsey as Don Pedro, *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1981. Ensemble, *Love's Labor's Lost*, 1983. Ensemble, *The Tempest*, 1981. Audience, 1981.

#### Center:

Executive Producer Jim Owen surveys the Plantation site, 1981.

#### Right, top to bottom:

Nancy Lee Painter as Celia, Ursula Meyer as Rosalind, *As You Like It*, 1981. Crew hangs the lights, 1982. Governor John Evans opens the 1983 season.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID BLAIN BOGIE, MARY ERDMANCZYK, DEBRA LYNN BOGIE, AND UNKNOWN





WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE



## The ParkCenter Years, 1984-1997



The ParkCenter location was ISF's home for 13 years providing a stability that cemented the company's place as a cornerstone of the Boise arts community. Notable milestones under Mark Cuddy's leadership during the early ParkCenter years established the company's future path: he directed the first non-Shakespeare play, the world premiere of *Robin Hood* by Don Nigro; introduced *Shakespeareance*, a tour that brought abbreviated Shakespeare plays to area schools; and cast the first African American actors in the 1985 season.

When the company again faced the need for new leadership in 1991, the Board made a key decision that continues to drive the Festival's success today: they hired Charles Fee as Producing Artistic Director. A year later, he introduced his choice for Managing Director, Mark Hofflund, who succeeded the talented and tireless Vangie Osborn as the company's longest-serving employee at nine years and soon to join the Peace Corps. Charles and Mark allowed the company to achieve the

stable, long-term management it sought. Together, Charles and Mark immediately raised ISF to a new level of professionalism by negotiating annual contracts with Actors' Equity Association and starting an ambitious campaign to build a permanent amphitheater. Their vision of a world-class venue to accommodate an evolving company and its ever-growing audiences, pushed the campaign's initial goal of \$500,000 in 1992 to \$3.7 million by 1996.

In 1997, the campaign reached new energy and excitement with leadership from Alan and Royanne Minskoff and support from one of ISF's founding members, Michael Hoffman. A successful feature film director in Hollywood, Mike called his friend and actor Kevin Kline, who graciously agreed to become the honorary Campaign Chair and to attend a major fundraiser in Boise. As 1997 closed out the ParkCenter years, the company neared its fundraising goal and broke ground for a permanent amphitheater on a 12-acre site on Warm Springs Avenue.

*"I remember a real sense at ParkCenter of beginning something. It was like plopping down in the middle of another country. My first year at the Plantation was building upon what had been built there. ParkCenter was a whole new ball game. It was a different part of town, it was really exposed, it wasn't hidden behind a shopping center. It felt like it was really higher stakes."*

—Mark Cuddy, Artistic Director

### IMAGES

#### Left, top to bottom:

The ParkCenter site, 1984. Chasee Clayton as Mamillius, Allen Oliver as Leontes, *The Winter's Tale*, 1985. Ensemble, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1989. Rick Robertson as Snout, Tedd McClellan as Flute, Lucas McClure as Starveling, Paul Frediani as Snug, Jay Sherlock as Peter Quince, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1986. View from the ParkCenter stage, 1989. Outlaw gang, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 1985.

#### Center:

Ensemble, *Scapino!* 1992.

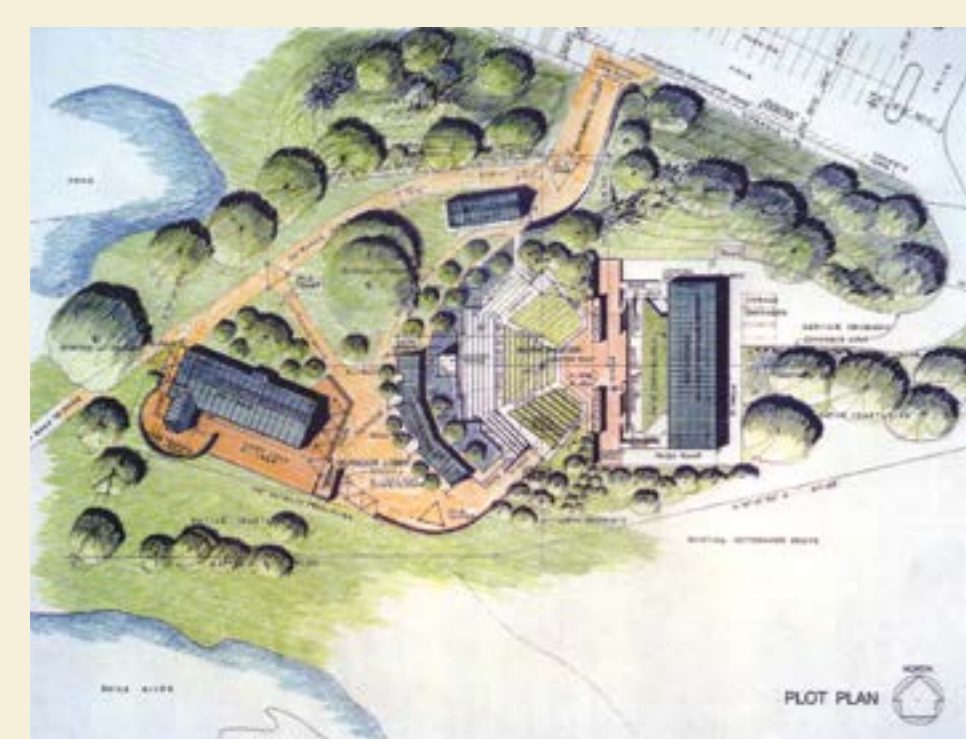
#### Upper Right:

Richard Klautsch as Petruchio, townspeople, Kathleen Tague as Kate, Joe Conley Golden as Grumio; *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1997.

#### Lower Right:

Kevin Kline and Charles Fee, 1997. Rendering of ISF Amphitheater and Reserve, 1996.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID BLAIN BOGIE AND TROY MABEN

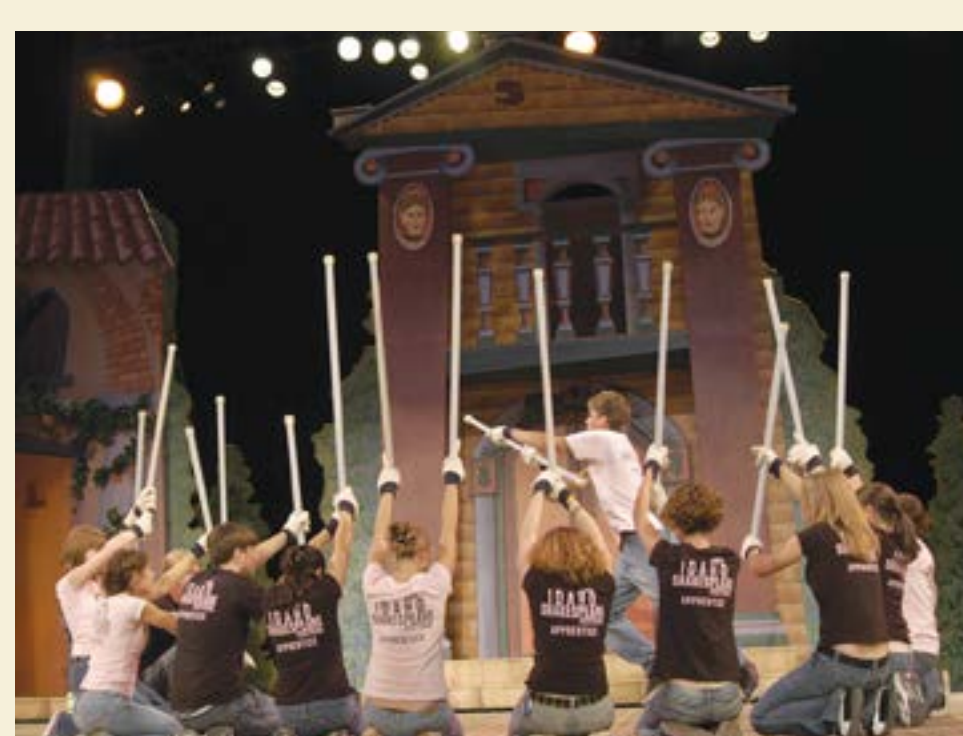






W H A T ' S P A S T I S P R O L O G U E

## Idaho Shakespeare Festival Amphitheater & Reserve, 1998-2006



At the start of the 1998 season, the amphitheater—whose design appropriately pays homage to Shakespeare's Globe Theater in London—was not yet finished. It took until 2001 for the site to be completed with dressing rooms, a box office, and public bathrooms, with the addition of Café Shakespeare in 2005. The unfinished site did not stop audiences from attending the inaugural season at the new amphitheater, which opened with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the same play as ISF's debut in 1977. With a 1960's theme inspired by the Beatles, the show went on to become the biggest hit to date in ISF history.

By 2003, the company consistently gained widespread recognition locally, nationally, and internationally. ISF productions were mounted in Cleveland, Seattle, Chicago, and New York; and *Cymbeline* appeared in Stratford-Upon-Avon, England, the first American-produced Shakespeare play staged at the Royal Shakespeare Company. ISF received the Idaho Governor's Award in 2001; *Shakespeareance* was selected as part

of a National Endowment for the Arts initiative to sponsor the largest tour ever of Shakespeare in America; President George W. Bush appointed Mark Hofflund to the National Council on the Arts; and Star Moxley received international recognition when her costume designs toured with the U.S. Institute for Theatre Technology's World Stage Design exhibit.

There were two other significant developments during this era: ISF increased its repertoire to five shows per season in 1999, and established ties with Great Lakes Theater in Cleveland in 2002. Charles assumed the role of Producing Artistic Director for both companies, which doubled the resources in shared productions and acting ensembles. In the 2004 season program, Charles assured ISF's theatergoers that "Every night, in every moment, we experience the play anew with our audience. And with every production we try and reinvent the wheel." And audiences responded by showing up: attendance jumped from 28,000 tickets sold in 1998 to over 50,000 in 2006.

*"We went into that first season with an amphitheater and a stage. We hadn't finished a hell of a lot of stuff. No dressing rooms, no public bathrooms, no box office, no concessions, nothing. Just dirt around an amphitheater. We had spent most of what we had raised to get that far, but everything was going to be okay. All that had to happen was we had to get an audience in there and they had to dig it, which we really could tell that they would. I mean, you could already feel how great it was going to be."*

—Charles Fee, Producing Artistic Director

*"Just having the new theater gave us the foundation for what we could ultimately bring into it. For example, it was designed to allow for additional lighting equipment. It also gave us a fundraising potential, as well as a national profile when we hosted our colleagues, and it gave us the artistic frame to do more and better work."*

—Mark Hofflund, Managing Director

### IMAGES

#### Left, top to bottom:

Aled Davies center with cast of *Henry V*, 2005. Construction begins on ISF's Amphitheater, 1998. Apprentice showcase, 2000. Cast of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, 2005. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the new Amphitheater, 1998. Samantha Quan as Hyacinthe, Allen Gilmore as Argante, Jeffrey Hawkins as Leandre, *Scapino!*, 1999.

#### Center:

Joe Conley Golden as Bottom, Dan Peterson as Flute, Sara Bruner as Snug, Tim Redmond as Starvling, Nathan Guisinger as Snout, M. A. Taylor as Peter Quince, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1998.

#### Upper Right:

Tom Willmorth as Puck, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1998.

#### Lower Right:

Ensemble, *Titus Andronicus*, 1999. Tom Willmorth as Dromio and Joe Conley Golden as Antipholus, *Comedy of Errors*, 2005.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GAGE WILLIAMS, TROY MABEN, JOSHUA JOHN FRACHISEUR AND UNKNOWN







WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE

## Idaho Shakespeare Festival Amphitheater & Reserve, 2007-2016



The Festival roared into its fourth decade with high hopes and big plans, only to be met with a recession that was draining the economy. Ticket sales were down from 2008 through 2010. Some peer theater companies closed their doors, never to return. ISF staff discussed cutting their proposed production of *Macbeth* from the 2009 season. The big tragedy was an expensive show to produce and had a limited number of performances, but it was also slated to open the fall season at the Great Lakes Theater in Cleveland and inaugurate that company's new home in the historic Hanna Theatre.

Thanks to a last minute infusion of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, the show went on, thrilling audiences in both Boise and Cleveland. By 2010 the economic woes began to abate, and attendance numbers rebounded to a new high in 2011 at more than 90% capacity over 93 performances.

The decade also saw some artistic changes. Charles decided to make the annual musical, which had been filling the September slot, part of the main season. *Cabaret*, *Sweeney Todd*, *My Fair Lady*, and others now delighted audiences all summer long. The move

was a huge success and helped increase overall ticket sales, not to mention audience appreciation, throughout the decade. He also introduced another crowd favorite, the murder mystery, with Agatha Christie taking center stage along with *The 39 Steps*, *Deathtrap*, and *Dial "M" For Murder*.

Everything was looking up again, until 2013 when a housing development was proposed for the 12 acre site next to the Festival that contained old sewage ponds. Having a few dozen homes within spitting distance of the Festival would create noise issues for both the Festival and the homeowners. After several months of wrangling over the issue community support for the Festival won out. Interestingly, the original owners of the land became major donors to the purchase of the land by the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands, in partnership with ISF.

What the future holds is anyone's guess, but the Boise community has supported its Festival through thick and thin for 40 years, just as audiences all over the world have supported the works of Shakespeare for 400 years. Together, they bring joy to thousands each summer, and plan to do so for many more decades to come.

*"Over the course of four decades ISF has become so ingrained in the fabric of these communities that it's hard to imagine what it was like before that small, determined group of actors, looking for a way to make a living at their craft, dared to dream for eight midsummer nights in 1977. And maybe we don't want to anyway."*

— Doug Copsey



### IMAGES

#### Left, top to bottom:

Veronica Von Tobel, Dakotah Brown, Tom Ford, Lina Chambers, Juan Rivera Lebron, *The Winter's Tale*, 2012. Jonathan Dyrud, Cassandra Bissell, Aled Davies, *King Lear*, 2015. Ensemble, *Les Misérables*, 2014. M.A. Taylor, Tom Willmorth, Joe Conley Golden, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, 2011. Richard Klautsch, Kathryn Cherasaro, David Anthony Smith, Andrew May, *Measure for Measure*, 2007. Ensemble, *Into the Woods*, 2008.

#### Center:

Idaho Shakespeare Festival Amphitheater and Reserve, 2014.

#### Right, top to bottom:

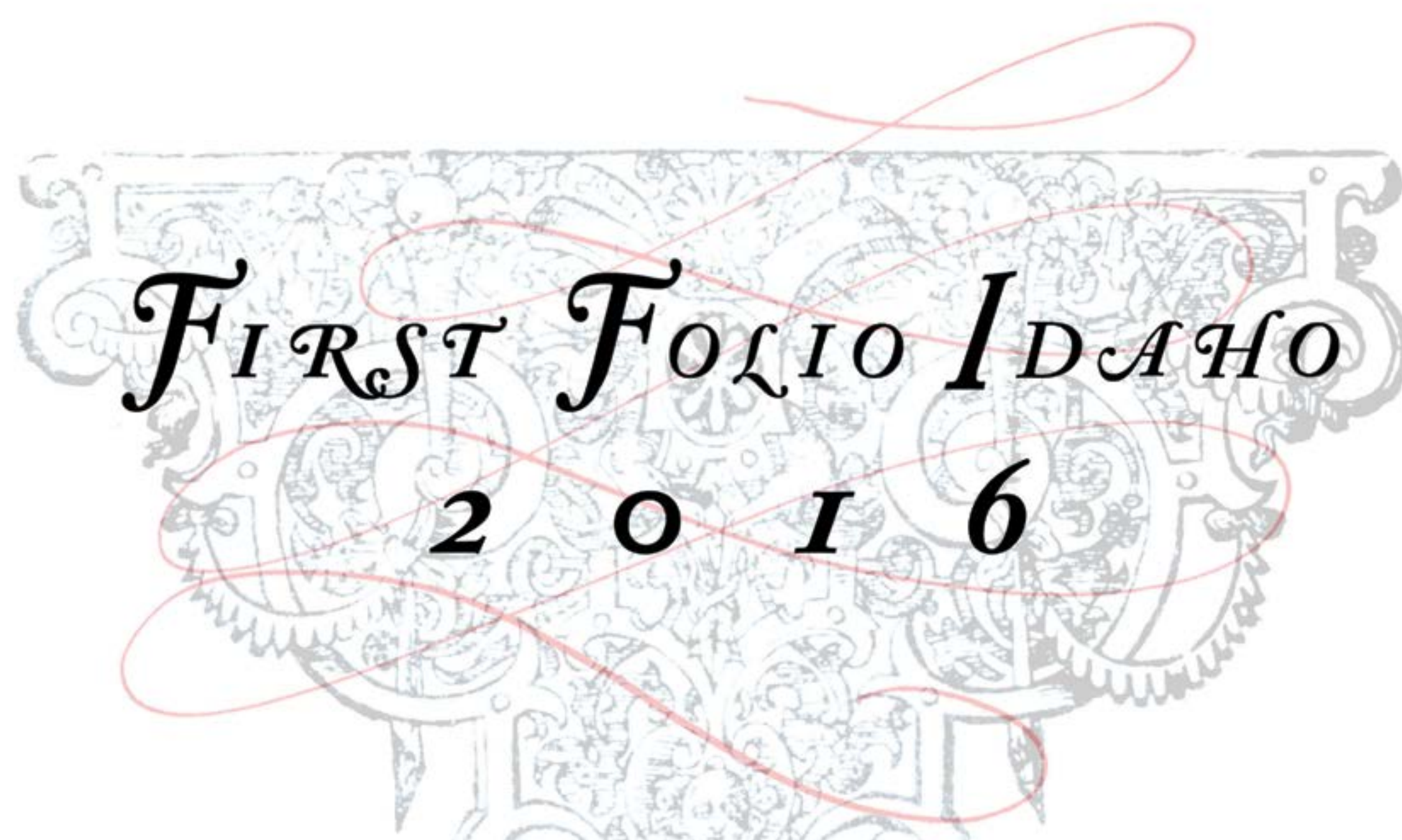
Laura Perrotta as Lady Capulet, Betsy Mugavero as Juliet, Laurie Birmingham as Nurse, *Romeo and Juliet*, 2012. *Shakespeare* cast of *Hamlet*, 2016. Ensemble, *Love's Labor's Lost*, 2016.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TROY MABEN AND DKM PHOTOGRAPHY





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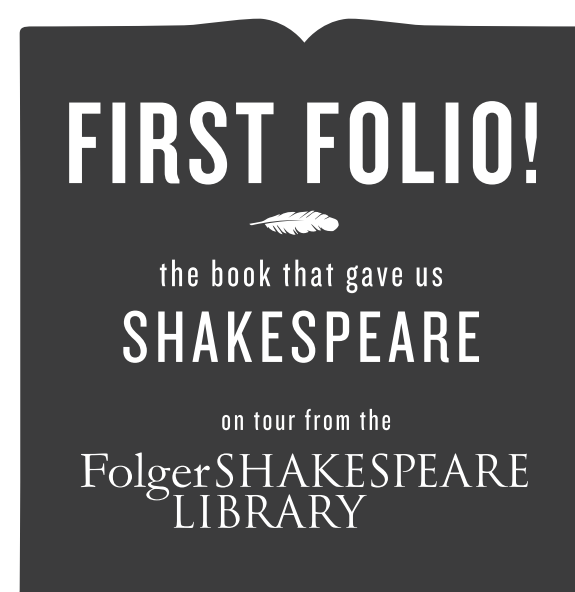
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